

# *FYAP Research, Summer 2012:*

## The Spatial Politics of Green Urban Redevelopment in Braddock, Pennsylvania

**Background:** Braddock, Pennsylvania is a post-industrial urban borough adjacent to the city of Pittsburgh that **suffered from severe decline** after the collapse of the steel industry during the 1980s, with a **drop in population from 20,000 to roughly 2,000 over roughly seven years**. Its civic leaders have adopted a variety of strategies as they attempt to reposition Braddock as a space in which a new and greener American urbanism can emerge. The borough has embarked on a national media campaign marketing Braddock as a site of hope for urban redevelopment amidst pervasive urban decay, with coverage in national outlets including the Washington Post and the New York Times. Levi Strauss and Company (the global denim maker) developed a major initiative in 2010 which **made Braddock's economic stagnation and redevelopment aims an explicit "muse" through which to promote the possibility of a broader American renewal**. In all of these efforts, a green redevelopment agenda for Braddock is explicit, but secondary to a foreground articulation of Braddock as a gritty new American urban frontier: a zone of opportunity in the midst of environmental and economic decay.

### Key Questions:

- How are green development and the inner urban frontier narrative combined and reconciled in Braddock?
- In what ways is the Braddock experiment successful in reducing income inequality in the context of environmentally friendly interventions, or replicable in other contexts?

### Initial Findings:

- To date, Braddock's political and spatial position on the margins of the Pittsburgh post-industrial redevelopment success story has **significantly limited its redevelopment potential**.
- **Legacy residents**—those who have remained since the 1980s steel bust—**are sharply divided** in their reactions to this new, environmentally-oriented strategy.
- **National attention** and foundation funds have been **linked to the activities of a small group** of (mostly white) young **urban "pioneers"** who have adopted a **homestead vocabulary**.

### Next Steps:

- In-depth interviews with both long-term residents and newcomers to better understand what these green redevelopment efforts mean to them.

